

HOW THE SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM IN BARBOUR COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA,  
WAS ORGANIZED AND CARRIED ON IN 1939-40 /1

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Based on annual reports for 1940 of State Nutrition Specialist, County Home  
Demonstration Agent, and Federal Extension NutritionistForeword

At the time of this report two Government programs born of business and agricultural depressions, were being used to promote school lunches for children of needy families. These were the Surplus Marketing Administration of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which needed outlets for food surpluses, and the Works Progress Administration, authorized to create jobs for the unemployed. Many localities where such help was needed, however, lacked interest in the school lunch, did not understand the programs, or were unwilling to accept them. In some areas, all that was needed was to crystallize public opinion and provide leadership and follow-up.

The extension Service, through its county home demonstration agents and nutrition specialists, has always promoted and assisted with the school lunch, which it recognized as a means of improving the nutrition and health of the children in rural families. Local home demonstration clubs of rural women have always had the interest of their own children and those of their neighbors at heart, and have helped to establish and maintain lunch programs in their local schools. Until recently, however, there were few State-wide school lunch programs fostered by the State Boards of Education, and no Nation-wide drive, such as we see today through the U.S. Office of Education, for schools to accept responsibility for the school lunch as a part of their own program, integrated with the rest of the school curriculum.

This piece of school lunch work, therefore, took place at a time when school administrators as well as local people needed to be made aware (1) of the need for well managed school lunches, and (2) of how to take advantage of recently inaugurated Government programs which had in mind the contribution of healthy childhood to the vigor of the nation.

West VirginiaFoods and Nutrition Specialist:

Most of the rural children in West Virginia travel to and from school by bus and are away from home the entire day. They leave home early, and breakfast is often sketchy or not eaten at all. In rural homes, dinner is often the main family meal,

/1 One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the Conference To Outline the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-torn Countries, held in Washington, D. C., September 19 to 22, 1944. Extension Service and Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, cooperating. Miriam Birdseye is specialist in nutrition for the Extension Service, War Food Administration, Washington 25, D. C.



and the evening meal is lighter, with a smaller variety of foods and a preponderance of carbohydrates -- such as potatoes, breads, cookies or cake, jelly or jam.

There has grown up a widespread sentiment among pre-adolescent and adolescent children against carrying any package with lunch which hampers them in going and coming. Crowded conditions on the school buses increase the inconvenience of carrying a lunch box. The Works Progress Administration and the Surplus Commodities Corporation have been very active in working out a hot lunch in many schools of the State. In a great many places, however, insurmountable problems of equipment, time, and personnel have presented themselves, so that a hot lunch at school could not be arranged.

The Extension Service has felt that it was the function of these groups to:

- (1) Create community interest in a school lunch.
- (2) Help with established lunches where help was needed with such things as supplementary food, equipment, etc.
- (3) Teach adults and 4-H members the characteristics and value of an adequate lunch.

The long-time goal of this program is to see that each school needing help is given it, and that teachers, parents, boys and girls in schools where a hot lunch is not possible, know its characteristics and appreciate its importance to health.

The 1940 goal was to make available to those needing it, lessons concerning a packed school lunch and its part in meeting the school child's food needs for the day. Through these it was hoped to make farm women who studied these leaflets conscious of their responsibility about school lunches without interfering objectionably with the program of the schools, the Works Progress Administration, or the Surplus Commodities Corporation.

#### Methods Used in the State as a Whole:

1. Farm women's club lessons. A series, three in number, similar to those used in the Feed the Family First program was prepared by the State home demonstration agent and the specialist and made available for study to the organized groups and others who desired to use them:
  - (1) The School Child's Meals - by Gertrude Humphreys
  - (2) Packing a Good Lunch for Schools - by Inez Prudent
  - (3) Soups, salads, and sweets for lunches - by Inez Prudent
2. Scoring lunches brought to meetings, using a school-lunch score card. This was carried out in large numbers of clubs in many counties. By this device farm women had actual experience eating a packed lunch and comparing it with accepted standards for such a lunch.
3. Reports made in club meetings of the school lunch situation in schools in the neighborhood in which the club members live.



Barbour County:

The actors are the nutrition specialist and the assistant State leader of the State Extension Service, the home demonstration agent in a county selected for a pilot demonstration, the farm women's groups and 4-H Clubs of rural boys and girls through whom the agent works, and the leaders of other agencies and groups within the county. Chief among these were the home economics teachers and other school people, the students; the farm security home management supervisor; the Parent-Teacher Associations, and interested business groups.

Barbour County in 1940 had a population of 19,869 people, 18,217 of whom were native white, 434 foreign white, and 1,218 Negroes. All but approximately 4,000 belong in the rural farm or rural non-farm groups. Most of the people make their living from farming on diversified farms, or on farms from which livestock is the major source of income. In 1943 there were 1,429 men employed in mines. The land is fairly uniform throughout the county, and the farms do not vary in size as much as in many other counties; there are more family size farms, and fewer large farms, and consequently a rather homogeneous rural group such as does not exist in counties having a land-owner social group set apart from the tenant group.

Barbour County, while it has some good farming sections, is on the whole a poor county, with a considerable proportion of drifting non-farm families who have only part-time employment if any. Many of these families live in small run-down houses with little ground around them. There is a part-time health officer but no health unit, public health nurse or school nurse in the county. Epidemics of communicable diseases are common. The desire to secure more and better health service had been registered in the program planning conference referred to later in this report.

Their common interests, their rather meager incomes, their dependence on the community itself for most of their social, religious, and educational life has helped to develop community consciousness and a more than average interest in their schools, churches, the 4-H club, the farm women's club, the farm bureau, and other institutions and organizations serving rural people. Since the three towns of the county are small and quite dependent upon the rural people, there is close cooperation between the town and rural groups.

In October 1939 a small group of farm women, mothers of school children in Barbour County, W. Va., met to scan important phases of their home and community living. Looking over the school-lunch situation, they were amazed at the lack of really adequate meals for their boys and girls. They appointed a committee to obtain the aid of interested educational and civic departments and to work with them. In November a general meeting was held. Representatives from the Farm Women's Bureau, Farm Security, and vocational home economics teachers' group, teachers, principals, the W.P.A. nutrition workers, and agricultural extension workers came, greeting the proposed plan for making a drive for better school lunches with enthusiasm. Miriam Birdseye, Federal extension nutrition specialist, and Mrs. Inez Prudent, State extension nutrition specialist, met with the group. The committee organized, appointing me, the home demonstration agent, as chairman, and the assistant farm security home economist as secretary and publicity director.



The initial step taken by the committee was to make a comprehensive survey of the school-lunch situation in the county. The assistant county superintendent of schools asked that every teacher have each child fill out a check sheet to be returned to the committee, which would summarize the figures.

Out of the 4,766 school children enrolled, 3,312 reported. It was significant that 3,466 boys and girls did not go home for lunch. More than three-fourths of them! Eighty-five percent received raw fruits and vegetables for some meal during the day, all or part of the time; 52 percent reported that they took at least 20 minutes to eat their lunches, and 15.5 percent - almost one-sixth of the children bringing in reports, - ate no breakfast. Not half the boys and girls received milk for lunch; and meat and bread were more frequently used for breakfast than brown cereals, eggs, tomatoes, and fruit juices.

At the time of the survey, about 600 children were being served hot lunches by the W.P.A. nutrition program in six centers. This included 375 of the children reported in the survey. Sixty-four teachers reported that they were interested in school-lunch programs; 48 needed foods, and 55 needed equipment.

Using the facts obtained from the survey, the county nutrition committee set to work to relieve the situation. The entire program was much publicized through local weekly papers. With encouragement, teachers began to establish centers in their one and two-room schools. The committee made them conscious that W.P.A. commodities were available for their schools if they would make arrangements to get them and to use them properly. Suggestions about equipment needed were made to these teachers. Miss Forrest Stewart, one of the vocational home economics teachers on the committee, had her classes make up menus based upon actual foods and commodities available in various communities and sent them to teachers with suggestions for preparing the foods. She solicited the help of the typing department of her school, where they were made up; and, furthermore, she obtained commercial booklets on good lunches for each school family.

A public service company lent five electric grills, which were placed in feeding centers. Five farm women's clubs, working in close harmony with the parent-teacher associations of their communities, purchased grills for their schools. Seven clubs donated equipment. In five of these clubs the members actually gave time to the cooking of foods.

Presentations of school-lunch programs were made in eight different community P.T.A. meetings. Thirty 4-H clubs conducted a program on each of these subjects: A Good School Lunch and Food for Health. One hundred and fifty-seven 4-H Club members scored themselves for 1 week on their own lunches, and 561 additional school children scored themselves for 1 day. One hundred farm women, mothers of school children, studied a series of three lessons on school lunches and scored demonstration lunches typical of those usually packed in their homes.

School-lunch week was conducted February 4 to 10, 1940. The nutrition committee selected sub-committees including almost every interested person in the county.

The newspaper committee, headed by Mrs. Clarence Herriss, Farm Security home supervisor, obtained the aid of the two weeklies in publishing, for a nominal sum, a school-lunch bulletin. Three pictures made at the expense of the local hospital authorities were included in the bulletin. The pictures were typical scenes in feeding centers, arranged by the teachers, cooks, and W.P.A. nutrition



supervisor. The articles written were typed by the Phillippi High School classes, edited and proofread by the committee. One of the weeklies gave a full-page spread at the same time to lunch news, including the pictures.

The store-window display committee, headed by Mrs. Marie Kittle, vocational home economics teacher, and Mrs. Genevieve Boyles, farm women's club member, arranged with merchants of Phillipi, Belington, and Junior to make displays of lunch foods and equipment for the week. A total of 24 displays was made. Children of the three schools made posters in their art classes, supervised by their art teachers. The Farm Women's Bureau obtained a State exhibit of the "Perky and Poky Families," showing a family with and a family without adequate food supply for the year and its relationship to their health. The committee furnished posters made by school children and others to 30 rural merchants to place in their stores. It is roughly estimated that 8,000 persons saw the displays.

The contest committee, headed by Mrs. D. R. Stemple, County Farm Women's Bureau health chairman, set up four contests and obtained sponsors for them. The school essay contests on Why I like Milk for Lunch were sponsored by the general nutrition committee and the two Kiwanis Clubs in the county. A word contest, open to all, and a menu contest, open to all mothers who pack lunches, were sponsored by a dairy pasteurization company. In each case, generous prizes were given to winners. A total of 62 entries was made in the contests. The judges selected were women trained in home economics.

Mrs. Inez Prudent, extension nutrition specialist, spoke in high school assemblies to 700 students, presenting a lecture demonstration on Filling the Day's Food Needs. Results of her presentation were indicated by increased sales of milk to students, new supplies of metal lunch boxes appearing in stores, and better lunches from home as reported by mothers.

By the end of February, 12 W.P.A. feeding centers had been established as regular programs, providing 730 students with hot foods, furnished partly by the Surplus Commodities Corporation and partly by the students themselves. In these centers paid W.P.A. cooks were used. Twenty-two other schools set up small cooking-feeding units to take care of 500 more students. Foods were provided from the same source, but the work was done by the students at the direction of the teachers. For part of the winter, 2,280 boys and girls received hot lunches, including the 1,200 who daily went home.

A definite check-up by the committee, with the assistance of the Board of Education and the W.P.A. supervisor, revealed that 25 schools had improved attendance, and 32 schools reported 803 students had gained an average of 3 pounds over and above normal growth.

1942

In three years the lunch program has grown from 6 to 26 feeding centers; from 400 to 2,000 students being fed. That is about 50 percent of the total enrollment. In schools where lunches are now served, teachers report a steady increase in weight. The average gain is from 3 to 5 pounds monthly.



1943

In 1943 16 schools served hot lunch for at least a part of the school year. In February the average number of pupils served each day was 711.

Reasons given for a decrease from the previous year were (1) lack of cooks; (2) complicated bookkeeping required by state and federal agencies providing funds; (3) less food and less money donated than when W.P.A. program was in effect; (4 ) lack of interest on the part of teachers.

Local people, particularly farm women's clubs, in several communities promoted the lunch project by canning foods, by donating food, and by helping prepare the lunches. In a few schools where cooks were not available the teachers did most of the cooking.

That the school officials are sold to the value of school lunches is proved by their report that in the schools where lunches are served the physical condition of the pupils is improved and that their school work is likewise better than where lunches are not served.